



Disabilities and poverty are closely interlinked in developing countries, locking people in a vicious cycle of disempowerment. In Bangladesh it is estimated that there are over 15 million people trapped in this cycle. One sustainable path out of the cycle can be found through education and skill development.

Mosharrof Hossain had finished his training and was two years into his career as a refrigeration mechanic when he lost both of his hands in an electrical accident. His friends and family convinced him that he would be unable to continue his trade because he was now disabled. Thinking he had no other choice, he learnt to use a microphone with no hands and got a job working as a hawker and then as a mobile phone cover salesman at a railway station. He quickly realised that to do any of these professions he needed assistance, so he was inspired to go back to his trade and employ apprentices to give him assistance. This way, he thought, he could also pass on his skills to young people.

When he started, other people around him laughed and criticised him, asking how it would be possible to run a shop without hands. Mosharrof learnt how to write, used all the money he had to buy an old fridge, serviced it and sold it at a reasonable price. He used the small profit to purchase another and continued until he had developed a small market and people had confidence in him. He began to take on apprentices to help him to run the shop, training them until they learnt enough skills to start their own businesses or work in larger organisations. As trainees often had little or no education and were from poor families, they would live for the first two years with Mosharrof's family before receiving regular payment. Mosharrof got the assistance he needed and the apprentices got the skills they needed to get jobs. His star students include a boy with an amputated leg who now runs his own shop in Comilla.

Mosharrof's involvement in the BRAC/UNICEF/ILO informal apprenticeship pilot programme has meant that he has been able to employ even more apprentices and hone his technical and training skills. He has been able to share his skills in a more effective, structured method and provide students with a stipend during training. Munia Refrigeration is now one of the most popular service shops in the Tongi district and the same people who criticised him in the start now refer customers to him.

"I have a message for disabled people – never think that you are disabled. Think always that you can do everything and then you will find that you will be able to do it. Be confident, maybe you have to try harder than other people so you will be stronger. Prove people wrong through your work."

Mosharrof is a master craftsman with a disability who is mentoring young apprentices in the TVET Reform Project, an initiative of the Government of Bangladesh, executed by the ILO and funded by the European Union. For more information, contact the ILO Dhaka via email: tvetreform@ilo.org or visit us on the web at ilo.org/tvet